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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights three sources that may have important implications for the future of social influence research in counseling. The first source presented is a major new literature review by P. Paul Heppner et al. that reviews the literature on social influence on counseling and updates earlier reviews. The discussion focuses on three main areas of change Heppner et al. would like to see in future counseling social influence research: (1) client and counselor characteristics; (2) client information processing; and (3) types of therapeutic interventions. The second source examined is the Elaboration Likelihood Model, a promising model for resolving problems in social influence research which deal with inconsistent findings regarding counselor characteristics, little behavior change resulting from client attitude change, and the difficulty of generalizing from social influence research in the laboratory to actual counseling. A new theoretical paper on social influence in counseling (Stan R. Strong, in press) is presented as the third source of future direction in research applying attitude change theory to counseling. Implications for the field are listed. (NB)

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# Future Directions in Research Applying Attitude Change Theories to Counseling

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Future Directions in Research Applying

Attitude Change Theories to Counseling

I'd like to focus on three sources of future direction in research applying attitude change theory to counseling. The first source is an in press chapter by P. Paul Heppner, and his colleagues at Missouri that reviews the literature on social influence in counseling and updates the reviews by Corrigan, Dell, Lewis, and Schmidt and by Heppner and Dixon, both done in the early 1980's. The second source is a relatively new attitude change theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Richard Petty, at Missouri, and John Cacioppo, at Iowa. The third source is a new theoretical paper on social influence in counseling by Stan Strong, at Virginia Commonwealth.

The Heppner, Menne, and Rosenberg Review

The first point worth noting from the recent Heppner review is that 41 studies have been done since the early 1980s. This suggests that this area of research is quite active, which bodes well for the future. The other points from that review that deserve mention here focus on changes that need to be made in order to insure the improvement of this research area.

This overhead [display Overhead 1] lists the three main areas of change Heppner et al. would like to see in future counseling social influence research. Client and counselor characteristics reflects a concern that the majority of studies in this area continue to operationalize clients and counselors in highly simplified ways. Counselors are often operationalized as brief video portrayals or written descriptions, undergraduate research volunteers are typically substituted for actual clients,

and the counseling is typically operationalized as a single, one-directional communication lasting a few minutes. Heppner et al., echoing a sentiment expressed by Stan Strong in his 1971 Boundary Conditions paper in JCP, are concerned that what is being studied may suffer from construct and external invalidity. They call for future research to reflect the diversity of counselor and client characteristics that exist in real life, and to adhere more closely to Strong's boundary conditions of (1) a conversation (2) of some duration (3) between two people of different status, (4) one of whom is psychologically distressed and (5) motivated to change. They believe that greater adherence to these conditions will allow for a more complete and complex understanding of attitude change in counseling.

Client information processing reflects the belief that Heppner and his colleagues have that one fruitful avenue for counseling social influence research involves viewing the client as an active, thinking agent in the change process, one who can be influenced by the content of an interaction, as well as by the presence of a diploma on the wall. I think without Stan Strong's intent, his (1968) paper entitled "Counseling: An Interpersonal Influence Process" has resulted in many studies that appear to view the client as a mechanism driven by counselor characteristics, rather than as an active organism able to respond selectively to a complex environment. Recent advances in social psychology make an information processing approach to attitude change in counseling viable and appropriate.

Type of therapeutic interventions refers to the recognition by Heppner et al. of a new approach in social influence studies.

In this new approach, studies look at specific types of interventions, such as interpretation or paradox, to assess their power to influence client attitudes and behavior. Heppner et al. suggest that "a broad range of intervention strategies need to be examined with[in] the social influence paradigm."

The Elaboration Likelihood Model

This overhead [display Overhead 2] presents a flow chart that depicts Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood model of attitude change (or ELM). The ELM is, perhaps, the best example of what Heppner et al. called for, namely an information processing theory that can help improve research on social influence in counseling.

The ELM is a major new approach in persuasion research and has received broad empirical support in explaining persuasion phenomena. It was first published in the 1980's (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981) and recently sufficient evidence has been amassed to be optimistic about its potential in understanding interpersonal influence in counseling (see Heesacker, in press; Cacioppo, Petty, & Stoltenberg, 1985; Petty, Cacioppo, & Heesacker, 1984; Stoltenberg, in press).

The ELM takes into consideration varying degrees of subject (or client) interest as a critical variable determining both the nature of attitudes and the extent to which they endure (see Petty & Cacioppo, in press). For example, subjects or clients who are both motivated (personally interested) and able to cognitively process the topic and/or content of a persuasive message are conceptualized as likely to be persuaded by a central route process. Subjects or clients who are not both motivated

and able to think about the persuasive message or topic are hypothesized as likely to be persuaded by a peripheral route process. It is important to note that Strong himself (e.g., Strong & Claiborn, 1982) has clearly indicated the importance of client involvement in the social influence process.

Central route persuasion involves subjects' own thoughts about the topic and their personal evaluation about the cogency of the arguments presented in the communication. It starts with a persuasive communication, which subjects must be motivated and able to process cognitively. The cognitive response must be predominantly favorable or unfavorable; neutral cognitive responding leads to peripheral route processing. Central route persuasion also requires consolidation into memory of the new cognitions elicited by the persuasive communication. To summarize, central route persuasion is more difficult to obtain, but lasts over time and influences behavior more strongly than peripheral route persuasion.

When the conditions for central route persuasion are not present, peripheral route persuasion may occur. In fact, the ELM suggests that peripheral route persuasion can only be effective in the absence of central route conditions. Peripheral route persuasion involves subjects (or clients) perceiving some cue in the persuasion context which is associated favorably or unfavorably with the attitude topic. When the cue is no longer present or recallable, the attitude produced by the cue will not endure, so peripheral route attitudes are said to be elastic. These peripheral route attitude changes are easily produced in the laboratory, but do not influence subjects' behavior as

strongly as central route attitudes (Petty, Cacioppo, & Heesacker, 1984). According to the ELM, if neither cognitive responding and consolidation nor cue perception occurs, no attitude change should occur.

A convincing body of research suggests that, just as the ELM would predict, central route attitudes are based on message content, are mediated by subjects' message-relevant thinking, persist over time, and are predictive of behavior. However, peripheral route attitudes, which are based on contextual cues such as source credibility or likeability, are not mediated by subjects' message relevant thinking, are less persistent over time, and less predictive of behavior, compared to central route attitudes (see reviews by Petty & Cacioppo, in press and Petty et al., 1984 for detailed discussions of this body of research).

The ELM holds promise in helping to resolve three existing problems in social influence research, namely inconsistent findings regarding counselor characteristics, little behavior change resulting from client attitude change, and difficulty generalizing from social influence research in the lab to actual counseling. Charles Claiborn, at Iowa, Cal Stoltenberg, now at Oklahoma, P. Paul Heppner, and I are all currently applying the ELM to counseling. Jack Martin and colleagues are doing related work on their Cognitive Mediation Paradigm in conjunction with the Counseling Psychology Research Group at Western Ontario.

Strong's Circumplex Model

The third source of future direction comes from an in press chapter by Stan Strong in which he complements such earlier theoretical statements as Strong (1968) and Strong and Claiborn

(1982). Generally speaking, the chapter makes a series of statements about the nature of the interpersonal influence process and then introduces a Learian circumplex model for understanding the likely results of the "iterative dance", to use Strong's words, between client and counselor in an ongoing counseling relationship. Both parts are important in enhancing the future of counseling interpersonal influence research.

This overhead is a selection and condensation of several important statements from Strong's paper regarding the nature of the interpersonal influence process [display Overhead 3]. Of course the chapter deserves your careful reading, but several themes are important. First, Strong thinks that both the desire to influence and the opportunities to be influenced are pervasive. This escalates the importance of viewing counseling as an influence process. Second, the influence process is multidirectional, both conscious and unconscious, and iterative. This, like statements made by Heppner et al., suggests the need for new and more complex ways of researching the social influence process, as well as the avoidance of "paradigm fixation," as Gelso (1979) has called it. Third, Strong's concept of "mutual vulnerability" suggests that Strong now believes not only that that the client needs to be motivated, but so does the counselor, for the relationship to continue. In general, Strong's theoretical statements suggest a need for viewing social inflence in counseling with increased importance and increased complexity, and for improved methodologies for understanding interpersonal influence in counseling.

This overhead [display Overhead 4] depicts Strong's

circumplex model of interpersonal influence. What follows is a direct quote from Strong's chapter to give you a brief description.

> In the model, eight classes of interpersonal behaviors are arranged along status and affiliation dimensions. The poles of the status dimension are dominant and submissive, and the poles of the affiliation dimension are friendly and hostile. The two diagonal dimensions of the model are labeled competitive-dependent and introverted-extroverted.
>
> The eight classes of interpersonal behaviors created by the four intersecting dimensions are labeled leading, self-enhancing, critical, distrustful, self-effacing, docile, cooperative, and nurturant. The members of each class of interpersonal behaviors are organized along an intensity dimension, with the least intense members falling at the origin of the circle and the most intense on the outer edge....
>
> Each of the eight classes of interpersonal behaviors is hypothesized to increase or evoke potentials in the other [person] to emit certain behaviors and to decrease or supress potential in the other [person] to emit certain other behaviors....The behaviors exert a determinitive influence on the behavior of interactants because they are the distal stimuli that interactants interpret to determine the psychological situation in which they are behaving.

One reflection I had while reading Strong's chapter was how reminiscent it was of parts of Darryl Bem's (1968) Self Perception Theory as an alternative to Leon Festinger's

Dissonance Theory. The emphasis in both Strong's chapter and Bem theory is less on internal states and more on overt behavior and the power of perception to influence people and change their behavior.

Conclusion

What I have tried to do is briefly highlight three sources that I think have important implications for the future of social influence research in counseling. These sources are a major new literature review and two new theoretical models. The implications for the field are these: (1) improvements are needed in the construct and external validity of our methodology, (2) this research area needs expansion into new kinds of methodology, and (3) we need to embrace increased complexity in our conceptualizations of counseling as a social influence process.

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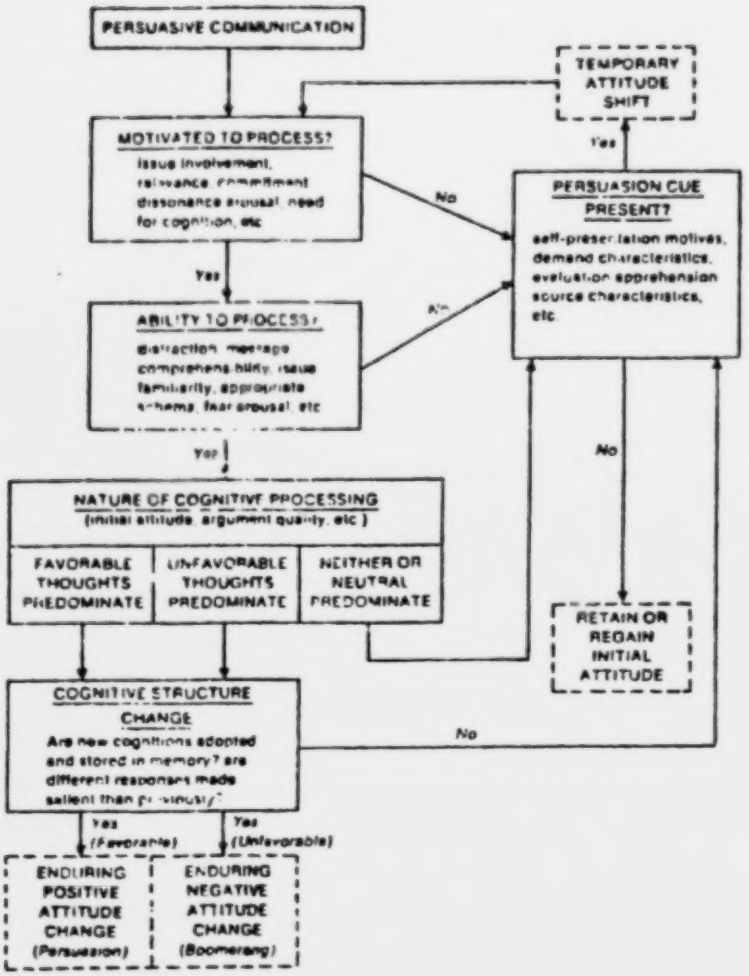
Overhead 1

1. Client and counselor characteristics
2. Client information processing
3. Type of therapeutic intervention

OVERHEAD 2


PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION
TEMPORARY ATTITUDE SHIFT
MOTIVATED TO PROCESS?
Issue involvement, relevance, commitment dissonance arousal, need for cognition, etc
No
Yes
PERSUASION CUE PRESENT?
self-presentation motives, demand characteristics, evaluation apprehension source characteristics, etc
ABILITY TO PROCESS?
distraction, message comprehensibility, issue familiarity, appropriate schema, fear arousal, etc
No
Yes
NATURE OF COGNITIVE PROCESSING
(initial attitude, argument quality, etc.)
FAVORABLE THOUGHTS PREDOMINATE
UNFAVORABLE THOUGHTS PREDOMINATE
NEITHER OR NEUTRAL PREDOMINATE
RETAIN OR REGAIN INITIAL ATTITUDE
COGNITIVE STRUCTURE CHANGE
Are new cognitions adopted and stored in memory? are different responses made salient than previously?
No
Yes (Favorable)
Yes (Unfavorable)
ENDURING POSITIVE ATTITUDE CHANGE (Persuasion)
ENDURING NEGATIVE ATTITUDE CHANGE (Boomerang)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Attitude Change.



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